

The Barn Owl (*Strix pratincola*) in Northern Vermont.—A male Barn Owl was killed in a barn in Lyndon, Vt., June 4, 1894, and bought by a gentleman in St. Johnsbury. The measurements of the bird were as follows: Length, 16.50; extent, 45.00; wing, 14.00; tail, 5.50; bill, 1.00; tarsus, 3.75. Its plumage was light in color and upon skinning, it was found to be very thin and muscular as though it had led a hard life.

The first known occurrence of a Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*) in this town was noted on May 5. They are frequent ten miles south but have not been known here before.—MARTHA G. TYLER, *Curator of the Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury, Vt.*

Observations on the Ruby-throated Hummingbird.—One 27th of May my son discovered a Hummingbird at work upon her nest, and drew for me a map of the locality by which I had no difficulty in finding the spot. It was well in the depths of an eighty acre forest. I watched my opportunity and while the bird was away for material succeeded in obtaining a desirable seat for observation. The saddle was already formed and the nest evened up to a platform level with the upper surface of the limb. It was placed beyond the middle of a long, slender maple branch about fifteen feet above the ground. The bird always followed the same direction whenever she went for material. Oftener than otherwise she returned laden to her nest in thirty-nine seconds after she left it—now and then more; once ninety seconds. I also spent much time there the 28th and 29th, and find the history of those days very similar to that of the 27th. Occasionally she took a vacation for food and rest; but those vacations were short. On May 30, at two P. M., the cup was complete and the bird was carrying silk and lining it. For this material she would be gone about as long again as for that of the outside. The next day, May 31, she was sitting. During incubation she sat lightly on her nest a few minutes, then off as many, and looked brightly about her while on her eggs.

On June 8 I found my bird in trouble; another female Hummingbird was trespassing. The aggressor would hover over the nest, swoop back and forth above it like a pendulum, alight with a tantalizing gesture on a twig close beside it, or, with a squeal, dart under it, and each time she came near would get driven away by the sitting bird. Twice I saw her rob the nest, once of lichens from the outside and once a good bill-full of silk from the lining. The poor mother came back to her eggs as often as she was disturbed. After watching the constant conflict for more than two hours, I left them still battling. The next day the nest was unoccupied. During all these thirteen days—I had spent much time in close observation—I did not once see a male Hummingbird in the vicinity of the nest. It was the female who did all the labor of nest-making and of incubation and who, as long as she could, valiantly defended her eggs and property. In my chosen seat I was not more than twenty feet from

the nest and entirely unhidden; yet the bird paid no more attention to me than she might had I been a part of the tree I very quietly leaned against.

I once saw a female Hummingbird gather lichens from the body of a beech tree. She held herself poised before it, darting upon it again and again, until she had in her bill all she wished to carry.

About nine o'clock one spring morning, when lilacs were in bloom, we discovered that the old lilac bush by the well was 'swarming' with Hummingbirds—just come; we knew they were not there a few minutes before. There are five large lilacs on our premises and those of a near neighbor. On investigation I found four of these bushes alive, as it were, with Hummers—all females. The fifth bush, a Persian, they did not favor. The Persian lilac, with its slender, lithe branches and great, drooping clusters, is very beautiful when in bloom, but its flowers lack the sweetness of the common species. Then, all the time, there were birds in the air constantly coming and going from bush to bush. They remained the greater part of the day. I spent much time standing within one of those bushes. The birds seemed not in the least disturbed by my presence. There were seldom less than ten and often fifteen of them about the particular bush I was occupying. Every now and then one would alight and sometimes would pass her long tongue back and forth through her bill to free it from pollen. In the afternoon a male Hummingbird occasionally came to the flowers but was invariably driven away by the females. Towards evening the flock, apparently undiminished in numbers, disappeared as abruptly as it had appeared in the morning. On the following day the Persian lilac was still in its native purple, but the beauty was gone from the other four bushes; the flowers were a dull copperas color.

Once again I fell in with a wave of migrating Hummingbirds. These were in the eighty-acre forest and this time all males. These were not in a close flock as before, but were very plentifully spiced throughout the forest.

In a neighbor's orchard a Hummingbird sucked juice from an apple while a young girl was in the act of paring it.

Once, on one of my rambles, I stopped to talk with a friend in her garden. A stalk of double velvet marigolds, broken over the day before, drooped upon the ground. I suppose decay had set in, yet, as the flowers were still tolerably bright, I carried them with me when I resumed my walk. While pausing at a cornfield a Hummingbird, leaving the corn blossoms, came and leisurely fed from the marigolds in my hand, inserting its bill between the outer petals of the flowers.

I (and others also, no doubt) have found it a very common thing for Hummingbirds to be hovering and apparently feeding in the vicinity of dead branches—branches checking in the summer sun. Are they not feeding upon something attracted by decaying limbs,—insects invisible to our eyes?—JANE L. HINE, *Sedan, Ind.*

The Bobolink on the Coast of South Carolina.—I regret the misapprehension of my meaning that led to the criticism in the last number of 'The Auk,' p. 179, and the possible inference that I am careless as to my statement of facts. I intended simply to say that the Bobolink in the interior of the State (Chester County) was abundant only in the spring. It did not occur to me that the expression would be interpreted differently, as abundance on the South Carolina coast, in the northward as well as the southward migration, belongs to the common stock of ornithological knowledge of which I could hardly be supposed to be ignorant.—
LEVERETT M. LOOMIS, *Tryon, N. C.*

An Ingenious Pair of House Finches (*Carpodacus frontalis*)—It is generally believed that birds construct their nests year after year and generation after generation after the same plan. There are few observers, however, whose experience does not furnish illustrations of the fact that individual birds are capable of departing from the nest building methods acquired by inheritance, and of resorting to new and ingenious expedients. The following is a case in point, and I am much mistaken if the reader does not conclude that the nest-builders in question possessed a considerable degree of reasoning power as well as of ingenuity.

A pair of California House Finches (*Carpodacus frontalis*) built a nest in the corner of the piazza of a country store. So tame and confiding have these pretty Finches become that I am persuaded that the larger proportion of their nests are built, not in trees and bushes as formerly, but in all sorts of odd nooks and crannies about the house and barn; and even when they are compelled by the lack of facilities to resort to bushes and shrubbery, they choose those as close to the house as possible.

The pertinacity with which the House Finch clings to a chosen nook about a house when their nests are destroyed is amazing, and is equalled only by the English Sparrow. I have known five nests with their contents to be destroyed one after another, and each time the same pair set to work with apparent unconcern to build anew.

But to return to my nest. The proprietor of the store called attention to it, suggesting that if it was of any use to me I had better take it as he was about to destroy it for the reason that the finches were an unmitigated pest in the orchard. This statement, I grieve to say, there is too much reason to believe is true. And great is the pity, for its beautiful song, domestic habits, and pretty plumage give it a place occupied by no other American bird.

Viewed from below, the nest was seen to be balanced rather than firmly placed upon a narrow joist, and I was at a loss to comprehend how it was maintained there even in calm weather, to say nothing of the high winds that prevail in this locality. By means of a step-ladder I was soon able to solve the problem. Having about one-half finished the structure, the birds evidently recognized the insecurity of its position, and the location being in every other respect eligible they hit upon the following remedy.